

*The internet search engine company Google has launched a new online tool to help track the spread of influenza in the United States. The company found that Americans falling ill searched for advice about flu online using its web facilities before they sought help from a doctor. Greg Morsbach reports:*

How many times have you **consulted** an internet search engine when you're feeling ill before going to your doctor for help? Many of us do exactly that when we're feeling sick.

Now the internet search engine Google has come up with a tool designed **to register search requests** for common phrases such as "flu **symptoms**" or "**muscles aches**".

The idea is **to map clusters** of influenza in the United States in order **to track the spread of the disease**. There are also plans to **roll out** the system in other countries around the world.

The new web tracker known as "Google Flu Trends" could act as **an early warning system** for internet users: if there are a lot of flu cases in your area, then you could **take preventative measures** such as have a flu jab. Early tests of the new web tool show it can detect regional outbreaks up to ten days earlier than the US health authorities.

A senior health expert from the United Nations told the BBC, Google Flu Trends would have to prove its reliability over time. But he added it could be very useful in nations where health authorities don't have **a reliable database of infectious diseases**.

*Greg Morsbach, BBC News*

## Vocabulary and definitions

<b>consulted</b>	to get information or advice from a person, book, (or here, the internet) with special knowledge on a particular subject
<b>to register search requests</b>	to record the number of times people ask the internet search engine a particular question
<b>symptoms</b>	feelings of illness or physical changes which are caused by a particular disease or illness (here, the flu, which is short for influenza)
<b>muscles aches</b>	soreness or tiredness in one of the tissues in the body that can tighten and relax to produce movement
<b>to map clusters</b>	to show on a map groups of similar things (here, people who have the flu) that are close together in close geographical areas
<b>to track the spread of the disease</b>	to record the progress or development of how the flu virus moves from place to place
<b>roll out</b>	make a new product or service (here, the new Google search tool) available for the first time
<b>an early warning system</b>	a tool that is meant to give a warning of danger before something becomes a very big problem
<b>take preventative measures</b>	do something now to stop something being a problem in the future
<b>a reliable database of infectious diseases</b>	a collection of information from a trusted or believable source about illnesses that can be passed from person to person

More on this story: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/7599342.stm>

Read and listen to the story and the vocabulary online:

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